

Arts and entertainment

Choir were credit to retiring conductor

THE Hexham Orpheus Choir, guest soloists and members of the chamber orchestra put together for the occasion should be justifiably proud of themselves in giving retiring conductor Val Thorne a first-class send-off.

In what proved to be a very interesting programme the audience was treated to the cantata *Rejoice Earth and Heaven* by Buxtehude; the *Concerto Grosso in A Major, Opus 6 No. 11* by Handel (who was influenced by Buxtehude), the coronation anthem *Let Thy Hand be Strengthened* also by Handel and the *Maria Theresa Mass* by Haydn.

The concert began with the cantata and involved all of the performers Gillian Dodd (soprano), Kathryn Crowder (alto), Paul Braiden (tenor), and Peter Braiden (bass), all of whom displayed fine voices with good diction and sensitivity.

They formed a ready partnership with the 30-strong choir and orchestra, the choir beginning brightly but there were one or two tentative moments at the imitative entries and I found the trumpets a little intrusive. Confidence grew, nerves disappeared and a good balance was maintained after that.

The concerto grosso puts great demands both technical and musical upon the players, but both concertino and ripieno players strode through all five movements with assurance and aplomb. They produced a clean attack, delineated phrasing and thoughtful sensitivity; I thought it excellent.

Unquestionably the choir

had been thrilled by the orchestra's musicianship and in their next piece, the Handel coronation mass they lifted their performance even higher. They produced a good warm tone, excellent diction, and good use of dynamics was in evidence.

Haydn's *Maria Theresa Mass* was the final item of the evening and it was written for soloists, choir and orchestra. It is a lengthy, vibrant and exuberant work, which mirrors Haydn's well-documented attitude towards his faith.

All performers were now on top form and put all of their energies in to the work resulting in a first-class performance.

Tempo changes were well-handled throughout as were the sensitive passages. All entries were confident and well-executed. The breath control of the soloists in the credo was an abject lesson for many would-be singers and their ensemble singing was well-balanced.

I was a little worried that the choir may tire towards the end but I need not have concerned myself as good diction, phrasing, and well-executed dynamics were maintained throughout.

Val Thorne is to be complimented for putting both programme and resources together and ably steering everyone throughout the evening. She is sure to be missed in Tynedale and we all wish her well for the future.

The Orpheus Choir will go on however under new conductor Glenn Davis and I for one hope for more of the same quality as this concert.

A.W.A